

Naotaro Moriyama, Jo Kanamori, and Kaoru Watanabe to Perform at the National Cherry Blossom Festival Opening

The Japan Foundation (JF) will send three groups of artists active in Japan and overseas to perform at the National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C..

Naotaro Moriyama was supposed to perform in front of a live audience at the festival in March 2020 but could not because the event moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, four years later, he will finally appear live at the festival opening. Jo Kanamori will direct and choreograph a new cherry blossom-themed piece for The Washington Ballet, which was established in 1976. World-renowned composer and musician Kaoru Watanabe will also give a performance. We hope the appeal of diverse genres of Japanese culture including song, dance, and music on American soil.



Photo: Kishin Shinoyama

National Cherry Blossom Festival Opening Performance

Project Schedule : March 23, 2024 (Saturday) 5:00 P.M.~6:30 P.M. (EDT)

Venue : Warner Theatre

Performer : Naotaro Moriyama, The Washington Ballet (Direction and Choreography : Jo Kanamori) , Kaoru Watanabe and others

Organizer : National Cherry Blossom Festival, Inc.

Co-presenter : The Japan Foundation

Naotaro Moriyama Performance

Details will be announced on the Japan Foundation website at a later date.

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【Artist Profiles】

Naotaro Moriyama



Born on April 23rd, 1976, in Tokyo. Moriyama is a folk singer and songwriter. He made his professional debut in October 2002 through a mini album titled "Dried Songs are the Best Foods to Feed Fishes". Since then, the originality of his point of view as well as his unique vocalization have been well praised by all generations of music lovers. He never stopped releasing new albums and actively touring around nationwide.

In recent years, he has also expanded his activities including acting, making appearances in NHK Saturday dramas such as "Kokoro no Kizu wo Iyasu to Iu Koto" and NHK's serial TV novel "Yell", for which he was highly praised for his acting ability.

Moriyama released his 20th Anniversary album "Wonderful World" in March 2022.

Starting in June of the same year, he embarked on his 20th Anniversary Tour titled "Wonderful World", which was also called "100 Tours in Japan". He concluded the tour in October 2023, but now an "extra" portion of the tour is underway. His most recent tour, "Wonderful World" <Extra Arc> in Ryogoku Kokugikan, is scheduled to be held on March 16, 2024.

In January 2023, he released his first acoustic album "Original Painting I" and "Original Painting II". He also released "Samoarinan (There You Are and Here It Comes)" which is the theme song for the movie "Lost Care" released in theaters in March. In October, the "Wonderful World" tour will have its final performance at NHK Hall in Tokyo. He was also commissioned for the theme song of animated TV series by Moyoko Anno titled "Ochibisan"; whose broadcasting started in October 2023. It is scheduled to be released on January 31, 2024, along with an analog release of this work on February 28 of the same year.

Naotaro Moriyama Official Website (<https://www.naotaro.com/>)

Jo Kanamori

Choreographer, Dancer. General Artistic director of Noism Company Niigata. Moved to Europe by himself when he was 17 years old, he studied under Maurice Béjart and others. He began creating while studying at Rudra Béjart School Lausanne and made his debut as choreographer at the age of 20 while enrolled in NDT2. After ten years of playing an active part as dancer and choreographer for several dance companies in Europe, he returned to Japan.

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In 2003, he won the Asahi Performing Arts Award for his first self-produced performance "no·mad·icproject ~ 7 fragments in memory" and made a leap into the spotlight. In April 2004, he was appointed as artistic director of the Dance Division of RYUTOPIA, and established Noism, Japan's first residential dance company of a public theater. Taking advantage of his abundant experience overseas, he has gained high praise for his works that he launches one another and his company works full of innovative creativity, and is active in a wide range of activities, such as

directing and choreographing an opera conducted by Seiji Ozawa at the Saito Kinen Festival Matsumoto. He has won many awards, including the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and

Technology Award for Artistic Encouragement, and the Niigata Nippo Culture Award both in 2008, and the 60th Mainichi Art Award. He received the Medal with Purple Ribbon in 2021.

Jo Kanamori Official Website (<https://jokanamori.com/>)

Kaoru Watanabe



Kaoru Watanabe is a New York-based contemporary music composer and musician. Born to musical parents in America, Watanabe was surrounded by diverse musical styles from a young age. He studied jazz at the Manhattan School of Music before moving to Japan to spend a decade as the first American performer and director of the taiko performing arts ensemble Kodo. Collaborations with esteemed artists like Living National Treasure Bando Tamasaburo V and calligrapher Koji Kakinuma have deeply influenced his artistic sensibilities to this day. Since

returning to New York, Watanabe has earned acclaim for his distinctive style as an avant-garde collaborator with diverse artists. He has performed with iconic artists such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Yo-Yo Ma, Laurie Anderson, Jason Moran, and Rhiannon Giddens. His creative output ranges from composing music for the Academy Award-nominated score for Wes Anderson's *Isle of Dogs* to being featured on The Silk Road Ensemble's Grammy-winning album *Sing Me Home*. In 2024, he and Baryshnikov Arts received a \$2 million grant from the Mellon Foundation to create a new festival, *Bloodlines Interwoven*, a celebration of diaspora artists through collaboration and storytelling.

Kaoru Watanabe Official Website <https://www.watanabekaoru.com/>

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